

Grades 4-6

Find the Theme Task Cards

16 story cards plus answer sheets for multiple choice or short answer responses.



- ✓ Addresses CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2
- ✓ Answer Keys, Challenge Cards and Theme Poster included.
- ✓ Perfect for your literacy center.

by 
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Find the Theme

Use these 16 story cards to help your students gain confidence in finding the theme of a story. There are three different answer sheets so that you can differentiate as needed: multiple choice, short answer, and half and half. There are also answer keys for each answer sheet so that students can check their own work. Also included are two challenge cards with three activities on each card to deepen understanding and extend the learning. Students could use notebook paper or journals to answer these questions. In addition, there is a theme poster that can be used at your literacy center as a reminder for students.

Theme is a challenging concept. While these cards can be used for individual practice (especially when using the multiple choice format), you may want to consider using them with your entire class or a small group by reading each story aloud and working together to determine the theme.

One thing to keep in mind when working with the short answer responses is that theme is somewhat subjective. The answers on the answer key are suggestions, but your students may come up with different variations. For example, the answer for Card #1 is "Persistence pays off," However, "Practice makes perfect," and "Never give up." would also be appropriate answers. Ultimately, you will need to determine which answers to accept.

These cards will look best in color, but will also print out fine in grayscale. Simply print and cut along the guidelines. Laminate and use them again and again. Alternatively, you could print on cardstock. It works well to keep them in a baggie. Another option is to hole-punch a corner of each card and put them all on a ring.

This product addresses the following Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

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You can find more reading strategy task cards in the task card section of my [Teachers Pay Teachers Store](#).



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Find the Theme

1

Kara chose a difficult piece to play for the piano recital. Her teacher advised her to select an easier piece, but Kara knew she could do it.

Kara practiced every day after school. When her friends called to see if she could play, Kara told them that she couldn't and continued to practice. Even with all that practicing, a week before the recital, Kara still could not play the piece without making mistakes. Kara thought about giving up and switching to an easier piece, but instead she decided to double her practice time.

The night of the recital arrived. Kara was the last student to play. As she walked onto the stage to take her place at the piano, she remembered the long hours she had spent practicing. Kara began to play. Her hands danced across the keyboard. She knew the piece so well! When the final note faded the room erupted in applause. She had played the piece perfectly!



Find the Theme

2

Kevin wasn't worried about his book report. He had three whole weeks to get it done. There was no reason to get started right away, especially when he had just gotten a new video game!

The next day, Kevin thought about going to the library to pick out a book for his report, but decided to play with his friends instead. He could go to the library on the weekend. The weekend came and instead of going to the library, Kevin spent the whole weekend at his cousin's farm. He didn't go to the library the next week either; there was always something fun to do instead.

Two weeks passed and Kevin still hadn't picked out a book. By the time he finally got to the library, there was not enough time to read the book and write the report. Kevin tried to write the report without reading the whole book, but it did not go very well. Kevin failed the assignment.



Find the Theme

3

Sarah didn't play with the new girl in her class, Laila, at recess. No one did. Laila had come to their school after winter break. She wore strange clothes and she spoke with an accent.

Then one day, the teacher put Sarah and the Laila together as partners on a class project. At first Sarah was nervous about working with someone so different, but then they began to talk. She found out that Laila had a little brother just like she did. Not only that, they both loved to draw and they both collected sea shells. Sarah invited Laila over after school to work on the project and see her shell collection. The girls worked well together and before she left, Sarah gave Laila one of her best shells to take home for her collection.

The next day, Laila invited Sarah over dinner. The food was really different than what Sarah was used to, but it was also really good. Laila's parents were nice too. The girls got an A on their project, but even better, they became good friends.



Find the Theme

4

Cassie was having a great time at summer camp. Her counselor was really nice and she had made friends with all of the girls in her cabin.

One day, a package arrived for Cassie. All the girls in her cabin watched as she opened it. It was a box of homemade chocolate chip cookies. Cassie's mother made the best chocolate chip cookies in the world! Cassie took one out of the box and was just about to take a bite when one of the other girls asked if she could have a cookie. Then all the girls were asking. Cassie counted the cookies in the box. There were exactly twelve of them. There were ten girls in the cabin. If she gave a cookie to each girl, there would only be two left for herself. Cassie knew that if she shared with one girl, she would have to share with everyone, so she decided not to share at all.

Cassie got to eat all of the cookies herself, but from then on the other girls hardly talked to her at all and no one wanted to be her friend anymore.



Find the Theme

5

Benny and Danny were twins. Each week, they each got five dollars in allowance. Benny always spent all of his allowance on candy and small toys. Every so often, Danny bought some candy, but he saved most of his money in a piggy bank that he kept on his nightstand by his bed. Sometimes, Danny did extra chores around the house to earn more money. He always put his earnings into his bank.

The months passed and soon school was out for summer. One day, Danny asked his parents to take him to the bike store. He had saved enough money for a new bike! Danny picked out a red bike with blue handlebars. His parents were so impressed with how much he had saved that they bought him a helmet and a bike lock.

Danny spent the summer riding his new bike around the neighborhood with his friends. Since he did not have a bike, Benny spent most of his summer alone at home.



Find the Theme

6

Lucy never put anything away. When she made her breakfast in the morning, she left the cereal and the milk out on the counter, and she left her dirty bowl on the table. When she got home from school, she tossed her coat and her backpack on the floor where her mother often tripped on them when she came in from work.

One day, Lucy and her friend Amelia decided to color pictures outside under the big oak tree. Lucy had just gotten a brand new box of 108 crayons and she wanted to try them out. They sat under the tree, happily coloring until it was time for Amelia to go home. "Want me to help clean up?" Amelia asked before she left.

"Nah, I'll do it later," Lucy replied as she headed inside to watch TV. Lucy watched three shows and forgot about the crayons. The next day, when Lucy went outside to play, she found that the sun had melted her new crayons into a big, goopy mess.



Find the Theme

7

One day Michael's new friend, Brice, invited him over for dinner. Brice's family had a lot of money and Michael was amazed at how big their house was. His family's whole apartment would probably fit in Brice's living room!

Michael's amazement turned to envy when he saw Brice's bedroom. Brice had his own computer, a big screen TV, and about every video game that was ever made! Michael had to share his tiny room with his brother and all they had was a shelf full of books.

When it was time for dinner, the boys went down to the dining room and sat at a long, fancy table. No one else came to sit with them. A woman served them their dinner and cleaned up after they were done.

"Is that your mom?" Michael asked.

"No, that's Ana, our maid." Brice replied. "My parents always work late. I almost never see them before I go to bed."

Michael thought about how his own family always ate dinner together. He thought about how his dad helped him with his homework and how his mom always came in to say goodnight to him at bedtime. Suddenly, he didn't feel so envious of Brice anymore.



Find the Theme

8

Sam had wanted to be a writer for as long as he could remember. He was always writing stories. In fifth grade his school had a short story contest. Sam worked on his entry for weeks. When he won first prize, which came with a check for \$100, his classmates kept saying how lucky he was.

Sam continued to write through middle school. In high school he took every English and writing class that he could. He even took a special writing class over the summer. Sam applied for three writing scholarships for college and got two of them! His brother, who had not applied for any scholarships, said that he was really lucky.

Sam worked hard in college. He became the editor of the college newspaper and started posting his stories on the internet. Toward the end of his senior year, one of his writing instructors told his class about well-known magazine that was looking to hire a junior writer. Hundreds of students applied for the job, including Sam. Sam worked for hours on his application letter. When he was selected for an interview, he spent days getting ready. Sam impressed the editors and got the job. "Man, how did you get so lucky?" asked one of his classmates. "Luck has nothing to do with it." replied Sam.



Find the Theme

9

Ethan had never learned to swim. He hadn't really needed to in the city where he had lived. But then his family moved to a new town. The town was on a lake and it soon became clear that everyone hung out down by the lake all summer long.

Ethan's family had moved in the spring and Ethan had made some great new friends at the end of the school year. But now he had a big problem. Everyone just assumed he could swim and he was too embarrassed to set them straight. So far, no one had really noticed that he never went into the water.

Then one day his friends decided they wanted to sit on the dock instead of on the beach. Ethan knew it would look strange if he did not come along, so he followed them out onto the dock. When they got past the shallow part of the lake, the boys started to horse around, and pretty soon they were pushing each other into the water. Suddenly, Ethan felt hands on his back. He lost his balance and plunged into the cold water. Down, down he sunk. Fortunately, the lifeguard was paying attention and was able to save Ethan from drowning.



Find the Theme

10

Cody had not studied for the big math test. When he got his test, he quickly realized that he had no idea how to solve the problems. Luckily, Cody sat right behind Emily. Emily was the best math student in the class and he could see her paper. Cody copied all of Emily's answers.

The next day when Mrs. Jenkins passed back the graded tests, she told that class that only two students had gotten A's. Since these two students had done so well, she would have them explain some of the more challenging problems to the class.

Emily was first. Mrs. Jenkins wrote a problem on the board. Emily solved it easily and explained each step to the class. Then it was Cody's turn. Again, Mrs. Jenkins wrote a problem on the board. Of course, Cody did not know how to solve the problem. A long moment passed as Cody stood in front of the board trying to figure out what to do. Some of his classmates started to whisper and snicker.

"Can you solve this problem?" Mrs. Jenkins finally asked. Humiliated, Cody just shook his head. Now everyone knew he had cheated and he was in big trouble.



Find the Theme

11

Mara's family lived next door to a very grumpy old lady named Mrs. Olson. Mrs. Olson was always yelling at Mara's family for making too much noise, or leaving toys in the driveway, or letting their grass grow too long.

One day, Mara was playing in the front yard when Mrs. Olson dropped a whole bag of groceries on her porch. Mara rushed to help. Despite Mrs. Olson's objections, Mara helped her to bring the groceries inside and to clean up the broken jar of applesauce.

The next day, Mrs. Olson called Mara over to her house. At first, Mara was a little scared. But Mrs. Olson just wanted her to help get some boxes down from the attic. After that, Mara started helping Mrs. Olson around the house a few times a week. Sometimes, Mrs. Olson would offer her tea and the two of them would sit at Mrs. Olson's big kitchen table and drink their tea and chat.

The years passed and Mara grew up and went to college, but whenever she came home, she always made sure to visit Mrs. Olson. One day, Mara got a letter from a lawyer. Mrs. Olson had died in her sleep. Mara was sad, but also surprised. The letter said that Mrs. Olson had thousands of dollars in the bank and she left it all to Mara.



Find the Theme

12

Mr. Jones decided to take his family camping. It was a beautiful weekend and the family was excited about the trip. So he packed up the car and away they went.

At first they had trouble finding an empty campsite. Most of the other campers had made reservations ahead of time. When they finally found one, Dad asked the kids, Tim and Katie, to pitch the tent. It wasn't long before Tim reported that he could not find the tent stakes. Sure enough, they were nowhere to be found.

Meanwhile, mom was trying to light the portable stove, but Dad had forgotten the matches. Not only that, they did not have a can opener to open the can of spaghetti sauce they had brought for dinner or a pot big enough to cook the noodles. Then Katie discovered that they had forgotten to bring the sleeping bags!

It soon became clear that camping was not going to happen. Grumpily, Dad packed everything back into the car and they drove back to the city. They picked up a pizza on the way home and everyone slept in their own beds that night.



Find the Theme

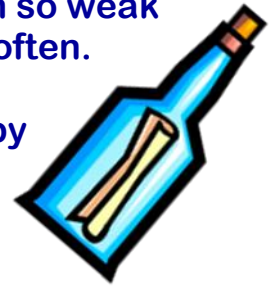
13

Ryan's life changed when he got sick. He didn't have a cold or the flu. Ryan had cancer. He got very sick and had to stay in the hospital for long time.

When his class at school found out about his illness, the teacher had them all make cards for him. Ryan had been popular with his classmates and while he appreciated the cards, he was surprised that no one from his class came to visit him, no one except James. James was a nice kid, a little shy, so Ryan had never gotten to know him well, but he had always liked him.

On that first visit, James brought Ryan some of his favorite comic books to read. James continued to visit Ryan a few times a week. James kept him updated on what was happening at school and helped him to keep up with the work that their teacher sent. James kept coming to the hospital, even when the cancer made Ryan so weak that he could hardly move or talk. In fact, he came more often.

The cancer treatments worked and Ryan got better. He returned to school and was greeted enthusiastically by his classmates. Although lots of kids wanted to play with him at recess and sit with him at lunch, Ryan preferred to spend most of his time with James.



Find the Theme

14

Mr. Tuttle was doing a unit on nutrition with his students. He decorated the classroom with posters showing healthy foods. Every day, he lectured his students about the importance of making good food choices like eating lots of fruits and vegetables and staying away from junk food.

Over the weekend, some of Mr. Tuttle's students went to the mall. They saw Mr. Tuttle in the food court. He was eating a corndog, French fries, and a chocolate milkshake. "Wow," said Jenna to one of her friends, "I guess eating healthy isn't so important after all."

"I wonder why he says all that stuff if he doesn't believe it." Tracy replied. "I was going to get a salad, but now I think I'll just get a slice of pizza and a soda instead."

"Me too," said Jenna.



Find the Theme

15

"Mom, guess what!" Claire yelled as she came through the door. "Taylor Carson invited me to her skating party tomorrow night! It's going to be so fun!"

Mom frowned. "I know you really want to go to that party, but tomorrow night is grandpa's 80th birthday. You know that. We've been planning it for months."

Claire's face fell. "Oh no. I forgot," she moaned. "But can't I go to the skating party? Grandpa will hardly even notice I'm not there."

"Absolutely not," replied Mom. "He most certainly will notice. You are his only grandchild and family comes first. Always."

Claire knew by the tone of her mother's voice that there was no arguing. She was so mad and so disappointed. She had been excited about her grandfather's party. Now she didn't even want to go.

On the night of the party, Claire spent most of her time sulking, wishing she were skating with her friends. Then grandpa called her over to his chair. "Claire-Bear," he said, "it means the world to me that you are here to celebrate my birthday. You are so very precious to me."

Claire's resentment disappeared. Mom was right. Skating would have been fun, but this was more important.



Find the Theme

16

Sasha was an only child and she was the apple of her parent's eye. She always had everything she wanted: a room full of expensive toys, new clothes, elaborate birthday parties, and frequent trips to Disney World. She never had to do chores around the house. She didn't even have a bedtime. When she did poorly in school, her parents complained to the teacher, and then to the principal. When she turned sixteen and got her driver's license, her parents bought her a brand new car.

The years passed and Sasha graduated from college. It was time for her to move out and get a job. Sasha got a job, but the work was hard and it didn't pay as much as she thought it should. She did not have enough money to buy expensive clothes or go on vacation. Instead, she shared a small apartment with two other girls. Before long, she got fired for not getting her work done and having a bad attitude. She lost two more jobs and could not pay her rent.

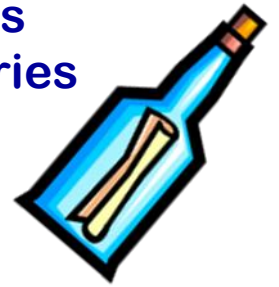
Sasha moved back home with her parents where she did not help around the house or try to get another job. Her parents did not understand. Why was their daughter so lazy? Why couldn't she keep a job and live on her own?



Find the Theme

Challenge Card A

1. What clues in the text did you use to help you determine the theme of the story?
2. Give a brief summary of the text. How is your summary different from the theme?
3. Can you think of another story that has a similar theme? How are the two stories different? How are they the same?



Find the Theme

Challenge Card B

1. Do you think the theme of the story could be useful in your own life? Why or why not?
2. Tell about a time when the theme of the story could be applied to your own life.
3. Write a new story that has the same theme as the story on the card.



Theme

The central message

- What the author wants you to learn or know.
- A broad idea about life.
- Usually not stated. Must be inferred.



Name _____

Date _____

Find the Theme Answer Sheet

Circle the theme for each card.

1	a. It takes a lot of practice to play the piano. b. Kara practiced a lot and did well. c. persistence pays off.
2	a. School work is more important than playing. b. Don't put things off till the last minute. c. Kevin should have done his book report first.
3	a. Don't judge people before you get to know them. b. Sarah and Leila became good friends. c. Friends are important.
4	a. You should always share everything. b. Selfishness leads to unhappiness. c. Cassie did not share her cookies.
5	a. You can buy more if you save your money. b. Danny is smarter than Benny. c. You should not spend all your money on candy.
6	a. Put things away when you are done using them. b. You shouldn't leave crayons out in the sun. c. Lucy is lazy and inconsiderate.
7	a. Michael's parents are better than Brice's b. You should not be envious of other people. c. There are more important things than money.
8	a. Sam got the job because he worked hard. b. You make your own luck. c. Some people are lucky and others aren't.

9	a. You should never swim without a lifeguard. b. If you can't swim, don't go to the lake. c. Speak up and tell the truth, even if it is hard.
10	a. Cheating does not pay off in the end. b. Cody got in trouble for cheating on his test. c. It is important to study for a test.
11	a. Sometimes grumpy people have a lot of money. b. Mara is a very kind person. c. Treat people with kindness.
12	a. Plan ahead and be prepared. b. Don't go camping without sleeping bags. c. Mr. Jones is not very good at camping.
13	a. It's nice to visit people who are sick. b. James is a good friend. c. Real friends don't go away when times are tough.
14	a. Actions speak louder than words. b. Eating healthy is not really that important. c. Mr. Tuttle should eat at home.
15	a. Claire loves her grandpa. b. Family is important. c. It is important to listen to your mother.
16	a. It is too hard for young people to live on their own. b. Sasha should grow up and get a job. c. Parents should not spoil their children.



Find the Theme Answer Key

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15	a. Claire loves her grandpa. b. Family is important. c. Always obey your mother.
16	a. It is too hard for young people to live on their own. b. Sasha should grow up and get a job. c. Parents should not spoil their children.

Name _____

Date _____

Find the Theme Answer Sheet

Write the theme for each card.

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Find the Theme Answer Key

1	persistence pays off.
2	Don't put things off till the last minute.
3	Don't judge people before you get to know them.
4	Selfishness leads to unhappiness.
5	You can buy more if you save your money.
6	Put things away when you are done using them.
7	There are more important things than money.
8	You make your own luck.

9	Speak up and tell the truth, even if it is hard.
10	Cheating does not pay off in the end.
11	Treat people with kindness.
12	Plan ahead and be prepared.
13	Real friends don't go away when times are tough.
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Date _____

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Circle the theme for each card.

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2	a. School work is more important that playing. b. Don't put things off till the last minute. c. Kevin should have done his book report first.
3	a. Don't judge people until you get to know them. b. Sarah and Leila became good friends. c. Friends are important.
4	a. You should always share everything. b. Selfishness and greed brings unhappiness. c. Cassie did not share her cookies.
5	a. You can buy more if you save your money. b. Danny is smarter than Benny. c. You should not spend all your money on candy.
6	a. Put things away when you are done using them. b. You shouldn't leave crayons out in the sun. c. Lucy is lazy and inconsiderate.
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Write the theme for each card.

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Find the Theme Answer Key

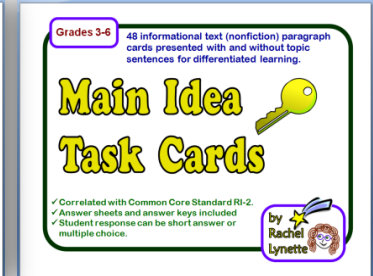
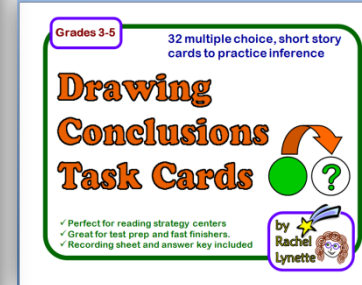
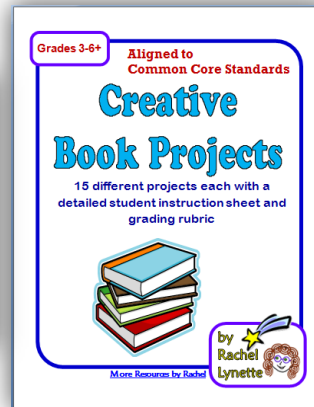
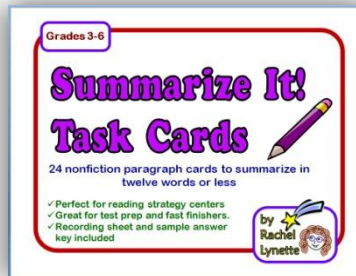
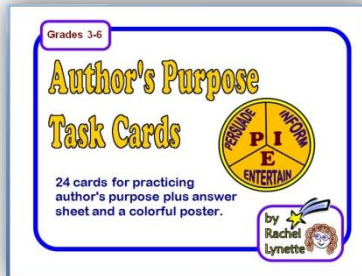
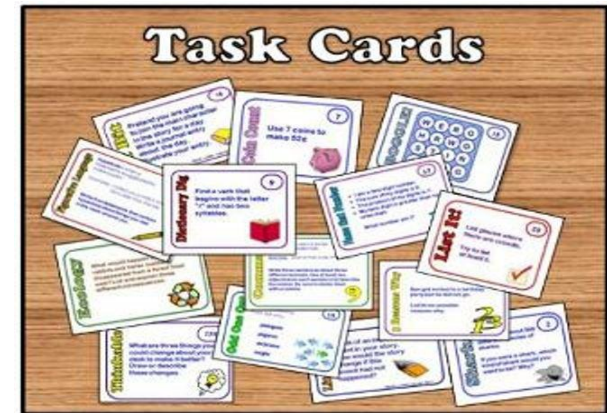
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14	Actions speak louder than words. .
15	Family is important.
16	Parents should not spoil their children.

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- ✓ Focused on higher level thinking skills